



COMMISSION EUROPÉENNE

SECRÉTARIAT GÉNÉRAL

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Strasbourg, 11 March 2008

**MINUTES**

**of the 1821st meeting of the Commission**

**held in Brussels**

**(Berlaymont)**

**on Wednesday 5 March 2008**

**(morning)**

—

**PV(2008)1821 final**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                                                                                                                                                 |            |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Attendance list</b>                                                                                                                          | <b>5-7</b> |
| 1. AGENDAS (OJ(2008)1821/3; SEC(2008)281/2).....                                                                                                | 8          |
| 2. WEEKLY MEETING OF CHEFS DE CABINET (SEC(2008)1821) .....                                                                                     | 8          |
| 3. MINUTES AND SPECIAL MINUTES OF 1820TH MEETING (27<br>FEBRUARY) (PV(2008)1820 ; PV(2008)1820, PART II) .....                                  | 9          |
| 4. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS (SEC(2008)286).....                                                                                             | 9          |
| 4.1. LEGISLATIVE MATTERS .....                                                                                                                  | 9          |
| 4.2. RELATIONS WITH THE COUNCIL .....                                                                                                           | 11         |
| 4.3. RELATIONS WITH PARLIAMENT .....                                                                                                            | 12         |
| 4.4. RELATIONS WITH THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE, THE<br>COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS, THE EUROPEAN OMBUDSMAN AND<br>NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS..... | 13         |
| 5. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF<br>POWERS.....                                                                             | 13         |
| 5.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED (SEC(2008)282 ET SEQ.).....                                                                                    | 13         |
| 5.2. SENSITIVE WRITTEN PROCEDURES (SEC(2008)283).....                                                                                           | 14         |
| 5.3. EMPOWERMENT (SEC(2008)284 ET SEQ.) .....                                                                                                   | 14         |
| 5.4. DELEGATION AND SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS .....                                                                                               | 14         |
| 6. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS (SEC(2008)285) .....                                                                                    | 14         |
| 6.1. DG REGIONAL POLICY – APPOINTMENT OF AD14/15 DIRECTOR<br>(PERS(2007)127 TO /3) .....                                                        | 14         |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| 6.2. DG ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS – TRANSFER OF AN AD14 OFFICIAL .....                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | 15 |
| 6.3. DG ENVIRONMENT- APPLICATION OF THE ARTICLE 50 PROCEDURE (SECOND STAGE) WITH RESPECT TO AN AD15 OFFICIAL (PERS(2008)39) .....                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 15 |
| 7. COMMUNICATION TO THE COMMISSION ON ENHANCING THE ENVIRONMENT FOR PROFESSIONAL ETHICS IN THE COMMISSION (SEC(2008)301 TO /4; SEC(2008) 305) .....                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 16 |
| 8. COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS ON THE PROGRESS OF EXPLORATORY TALKS ON THE EXTENSION OF THE MAIN TRANS-EUROPEAN TRANSPORT ROUTES TO NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES AND REGIONS (COM(2008)125 TO /4; SEC(2008) 278) .....                             | 16 |
| 9. COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION TO THE COUNCIL TO AUTHORISE THE COMMISSION TO OPEN NEGOTIATIONS, ON BEHALF OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY, WITH ALBANIA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, CROATIA, THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA, MONTENEGRO, SERBIA, AND KOSOVO ON A TREATY ESTABLISHING A TRANSPORT COMMUNITY (SEC(2008)287 TO /4; SEC(2008)278) ..... | 17 |
| 10. COMMISSION DECISION ON A PROCEEDING UNDER ARTICLE 86(3) OF THE EC TREATY CONCERNING THE GRANTING OR MAINTENANCE BY GREECE OF RIGHTS FOR PUBLIC POWER CORPORATION SA FOR THE EXTRACTION OF LIGNITE (CASE COMP/38.700 – GREEK LIGNITE AND ELECTRICITY MARKETS) (C(2008)824 TO /5; SEC(2008) 307) .....                                            | 17 |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| 11. COMMISSION DECISION ON A PROCEEDING UNDER<br>ARTICLE 8(1) OF COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) 139/2004 ON THE<br>CONTROL OF CONCENTRATIONS BETWEEN UNDERTAKINGS<br>AND ARTICLE 57 OF THE EEA AGREEMENT ( <i>CASE COMP/M.4747</i><br><i>– IBM/TELELOGIC</i> ) (C(2008)823 TO /5)..... | 18 |
| 12. RELATIONS WITH THIRD COUNTRIES .....                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | 19 |
| 12.1. COMMISSION RESPONSE TO THE POST-ELECTORAL POLITICAL CRISIS IN<br>KENYA (JANUARY AND FEBRUARY) (SEC(2008)318).....                                                                                                                                                         | 19 |
| 12.2. VISIT TO CHAD (N'DJAMENA, 27 FEBRUARY) (SEC(2008)319).....                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 19 |
| 12.3. LATEST DEVELOPMENTS CONCERNING IMPORTS OF BEEF FROM BRAZIL<br>(SEC(2008)321/2).....                                                                                                                                                                                       | 19 |
| 13. OTHER BUSINESS.....                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | 19 |
| RESULTS OF THE EUROBAROMETER SURVEY ON PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF THE<br>EUROPEAN REGIONAL POLICY (SEC(2008)324).....                                                                                                                                                                 | 19 |
| 14. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO PARLIAMENT<br>AND THE COUNCIL – WESTERN BALKANS - ENHANCING THE<br>EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE (COM(2008)127 TO /6; SEC(2008)288<br>AND /2; SEC(2008)289).....                                                                                | 20 |
| 15. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO PARLIAMENT,<br>THE COUNCIL, THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND<br>THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS – REINFORCING THE<br>UNION'S DISASTER RESPONSE CAPACITY (COM(2008)130 TO /4;<br>SEC(2008)306).....                                   | 25 |
| 16. TRENDS IN THE MEMBER STATES .....                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | 26 |

**Single sitting: Wednesday 5 March 2008 (morning)**

The sitting opened at 09.08 hours with Mr BARROSO, President, in the chair.

**Present**

|                    |                |                          |
|--------------------|----------------|--------------------------|
| Mr BARROSO         | President      |                          |
| Ms WALLSTRÖM       | Vice-President |                          |
| Mr VERHEUGEN       | Vice-President |                          |
| Mr BARROT          | Vice-President | Items 1 to 15            |
| Mr KALLAS          | Vice-President |                          |
| Mr FRATTINI        | Vice-President |                          |
| Ms REDING          |                |                          |
| Mr DIMAS           |                | Items 1 to 14 (in part)  |
| Mr ALMUNIA         |                |                          |
| Mr POTOČNIK        |                |                          |
| Mr FIGEL'          |                |                          |
| Mr REHN            |                | Items 1 to 16 (in part)  |
| Mr MICHEL          |                | Items 1 to 14 (in part)  |
| Mr KOVÁCS          |                |                          |
| Ms KROES           |                | Items 1 to 14 (in part)  |
| Ms FERRERO-WALDNER |                | Items 1 to 15            |
| Mr McCREEVY        |                | Items 14 (in part) to 16 |
| Mr ŠPIDLA          |                |                          |
| Ms KUNEVA          |                |                          |
| Mr ORBAN           |                |                          |
| Ms VASSILIOU       |                |                          |

Absent

Ms HÜBNER

Mr BORG

Ms GRYBAUSKAITĖ

Ms FISCHER BOEL

Mr MANDELSON

Mr PIEBALGS

The following sat in to represent absent Members of the Commission

|                   |                                    |
|-------------------|------------------------------------|
| Mr LEMAITRE       | Chef de cabinet to Ms HÜBNER       |
| Mr TABONE         | Chef de cabinet to Mr BORG         |
| Mr QUEST          | Chef de cabinet to Ms GRYBAUSKAITĖ |
| Mr CHRISTOFFERSEN | Chef de cabinet to Ms FISCHER BOEL |
| Mr HOUBEN         | A member of Mr MANDELSON's staff   |
| Mr KESTERIS       | Chef de cabinet to Mr PIEBALGS     |

The following also sat in

|                       |                                                                |                           |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Mr VALE DE ALMEIDA    | Chef de cabinet to the President                               | Items 14 to 16            |
| Ms DURAND             | Acting Director-General, Legal Service                         |                           |
| Mr SØRENSEN           | Director-General, DG Communication                             |                           |
| Mr LAITENBERGER       | Commission Spokesman                                           | Items 14 (in part) to 16  |
| Mr GASPAR             | Acting Director-General, Bureau of<br>European Policy Advisers |                           |
| Ms MARTINHO           | Chief adviser in the PRESIDENT's Office                        | Items 1 to 14             |
| Mr ANDRESEN GUIMARÃES | A member of the PRESIDENT's staff                              | Items 14 (in part) and 15 |
| Mr SAGREDO            | A member of Mr BARROT's staff                                  | Items 15 and 16           |
| Mr PESONEN            | Chef de cabinet to Mr REHN                                     | Items 1 to 14             |
| Mr LEIGH              | Director-General, DG Enlargement                               | Items 1 to 14             |

Secretary: Ms DAY, Secretary-General, assisted by Mr AYET PUIGARNAU, Director in the Secretariat-General.

The PRESIDENT welcomed Ms VASSILIOU, the new Member of the Commission appointed to replace Mr KYPRIANOU, who had become Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cyprus.

Introducing Ms VASSILIOU, the PRESIDENT mentioned in particular her experience in the field of health, and her unfailing belief in Europe. He was convinced that Ms VASSILIOU would contribute effectively to the achievement of the goals of the present Commission.

The PRESIDENT wished Ms VASSILIOU every success in the performance of her new functions.

Ms VASSILIOU in turn thanked the PRESIDENT for the trust he placed in her; she was honoured to have been made a Member of the Commission. She restated her commitment to Europe and her willingness to contribute actively to the work of the present Commission.

\* \* \*

## **1. AGENDAS**

**(OJ(2008)1821/3; SEC(2008)281/2)**

The Commission took note of that day's agenda and of the tentative agendas for forthcoming meetings.

## **2. WEEKLY MEETING OF CHEFS DE CABINET**

**(SEC(2008)1821)**

The Commission considered the Secretary-General's report on the weekly meeting of Chefs de cabinet held on Monday 3 March.

**3. MINUTES AND SPECIAL MINUTES OF 1820<sup>TH</sup> MEETING (27 FEBRUARY)  
(PV(2008)1820 ; PV(2008)1820, PART II)**

The Commission approved the minutes of its 1820th meeting.

**4. INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS  
(SEC(2008)286)**

The Commission took note of the record of the meeting of the Interinstitutional Relations Group held on Friday 29 February (SEC(2006)286).

It paid particular attention to the following:

**4.1. *LEGISLATIVE MATTERS***

**i) Preparation of agreement at first reading**

(point 1.1.3 of the IRG record)

- Selection and authorisation of systems supplying mobile satellite services (MSS) (Decision) – HALL report – 2007/0174 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SP(2008)124 and authorised Ms REDING to continue contacts with Parliament and the Council with a view to securing agreement at first reading.

- Implementation of the deployment and commercial operating phases of the European satellite radionavigation programme (Regulation) – GALILEO Programme – BARSÍ PATAKY report – 2004/0156 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SP(2008)125 and authorised Mr BARROT to continue contacts with Parliament and the Council with a view to securing agreement at first reading.

**ii) Preparation for Parliament's March part-session**

(point 1.2 of the IRG record)

In accordance with the rules in force, the Commission authorised the Commission Members responsible, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and Ms WALLSTRÖM and any other Members associated, to take a position on Parliament's amendments to its proposals.

It paid particular attention to the following:

Codecision, 2nd reading

- Creation of the European Institute of Technology (Regulation) – PAASILINNA report – 2006/0197 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SP(2008)1182.

Empowerment

- Creation of the European Institute of Technology (Regulation) – PAASILINNA report – 2006/0197 (COD)

The Commission empowered Mr FIGEL', under Article 13 of its Rules of Procedure, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and Ms WALLSTRÖM and any associated Members, to adopt and transmit to the Council its opinion on the amendments, in accordance with Article 251(2)(c) of the Treaty, once Parliament had given its view, and if necessary to attach to its opinion an amended proposal, on the basis of the line set out in SP(2008)1182.

Codecision, 1st reading

- Research and development programme aimed at enhancing the quality of life of older people through the use of new Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), undertaken by several Member States – GILL report – 2007/0116 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SP(2008)1183.

- Energy statistics (Regulation) – TURMES report – 2007/0002 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SP(2008)1185.

- Statistics on plant health products (Regulation) – STAES report – 2006/0258 (COD)

The Commission approved the line set out in SP(2008)1186 and /2.

#### Consultation

- Common organisation of agricultural markets and specific provisions for certain agricultural products (single CMO Regulation) as regards the national quotas for milk (Regulation) – JEGGLE report – 2007/0281 (CNS)

The Commission approved the line set out in SP(2008)1187 and /2.

- Adjustment of special tax arrangements for gas oil used as motor fuel for commercial purposes and the coordination of taxation of unleaded petrol and gas oil used as motor fuel (Directive) – SCHMIDT report – 2007/0023 (CNS)

The Commission approved the line set out in SP(2008)1188 and /2.

## **4.2. RELATIONS WITH THE COUNCIL**

### **iii) Programming of Council business**

(SI(2008)130)

The Commission took note of the information in SI(2008)130 on the Council meetings between 28 February and 12 March.

**iv) Results of Council meeting (Justice and Home Affairs) (Brussels, 28 February)**

(SEC(2008)320; SI(2008)149; SI(2008)146)

- Schengen Information System II (SIS II) and United States Visa Waiver Program (VWP) legislation

The Commission took note of the information note from Mr FRATTINI in SEC(2008)320.

**v) Adoption by the Commission of non-binding instruments at international level**

(point 2.3 of the IRG record)

- Memorandum of Understanding between the Commission and other international institutions in the field of auditing of companies

The Commission authorised Mr McCREEVY to sign, on behalf of the Commission, and to implement the Memorandum of Understanding between the Commission and other international institutions in the field of auditing of companies, as set out in SI(2008)123 and following the line set out in that note.

**4.3. RELATIONS WITH PARLIAMENT**

**vi) Action taken on Parliament's non-legislative resolutions**

(point 3.4.2 of the IRG record)

The Commission approved document SP(2008)532/3 on the action taken on the non-legislative resolutions adopted by Parliament at its December part-session, for transmission to Parliament.

**vii) Action taken on Parliament's opinions and non-legislative resolutions**

(point 3.4.3 of the IRG record)

The Commission approved document SP(2008)1176 on the action taken on the opinions and non-legislative resolutions adopted by Parliament at its January I and II part-sessions, for transmission to Parliament.

**4.4. RELATIONS WITH THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE, THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS, THE EUROPEAN OMBUDSMAN AND NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS**

**viii) Action taken on opinions of the European Economic and Social Committee – Third quarter 2007**

(point 4.1 of the IRG record)

The Commission approved the replies to the opinions adopted by the Economic and Social Committee during the third quarter of 2007 contained in the documents distributed as SC(2008)12/2 and 3, for transmission to the European Economic and Social Committee.

**5. WRITTEN PROCEDURES, EMPOWERMENT AND DELEGATION OF POWERS**

**5.1. WRITTEN PROCEDURES APPROVED**

*(SEC(2008)282 ET SEQ.)*

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 25 and 29 February.

**5.2. SENSITIVE WRITTEN PROCEDURES**  
**(SEC(2008)283)**

The Commission took note of the sensitive written procedures for which the time limit expired between 3 and 7 March.

**5.3. EMPOWERMENT**  
**(SEC(2008)284 ET SEQ.)**

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted between 25 and 29 February.

**5.4. DELEGATION AND SUBDELEGATION OF POWERS**

The Commission took note of the Secretariat-General's memoranda recording decisions adopted under the delegation procedure between 25 and 29 February, as archived in Greffe 2000 (Registry).

**6. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS**  
**(SEC(2008)285)**

**ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS**  
**(PERS(2008)38)**

**6.1. DG REGIONAL POLICY – APPOINTMENT OF AD14/15 DIRECTOR**  
**(PERS(2007)127 TO /3)**

The Commission had before it applications under Article 29(1)(a)(i) and (iii) of the Staff Regulations for the post of Director, Resources, in the Directorate-General for Regional Policy (PERS(2007)127).

The Commission took note of the opinions of the Consultative Committee on Appointments of 11 December 2007 and 31 January 2008 (PERS(2007)127/2 and /3).

(3 March 2008)

The Commission proceeded to compare the applicants' qualifications for the post. It also considered their ability, efficiency and conduct in the service. On a proposal from Mr KALLAS, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and Ms HÜBNER, it then decided to appoint Ms Vittoria ALLIATA DI VILLAFRANCA to the post.

This decision would take effect on a date to be determined.

**6.2. *DG ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS – TRANSFER OF AN AD14 OFFICIAL***

On a proposal from Mr KALLAS, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and Mr ALMUNIA, the Commission decided, under Article 7 of the Staff Regulations, to fill the post of Director, Structural Reforms and Lisbon strategy. Economic Evaluation, in the Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs by the transfer in the interest of the service of Mr Gert-Jan KOOPMAN, an AD14 official currently Director in the Directorate-General for Enterprise and Industry.

This decision would take effect on 1 May 2008.

**6.3. *DG ENVIRONMENT- APPLICATION OF THE ARTICLE 50 PROCEDURE (SECOND STAGE) WITH RESPECT TO AN AD15 OFFICIAL (PERS(2008)39)***

The Commission continued its discussions on this matter, begun on 30 January 2008 (PV(2008)1816).

On a proposal from Mr KALLAS, in agreement with the PRESIDENT and Mr DIMAS, the Commission adopted the decision in PERS(2008)39 applying the second stage of the procedure laid down in Article 50 of the Staff Regulations with respect to Mr David Grant LAWRENCE, an AD15 official, currently Director, Water Protection, Chemicals, Cohesion, in the Directorate-General for the Environment.

This decision would take effect on 1 May 2008.

**7. COMMUNICATION TO THE COMMISSION ON ENHANCING THE ENVIRONMENT FOR PROFESSIONAL ETHICS IN THE COMMISSION (SEC(2008)301 TO /4; SEC(2008)305)**

The Commission adopted the communication set out in SEC(2008)301/4.

**8. COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS ON THE PROGRESS OF EXPLORATORY TALKS ON THE EXTENSION OF THE MAIN TRANS-EUROPEAN TRANSPORT ROUTES TO NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES AND REGIONS (COM(2008)125 TO /4; SEC(2008)278)**

The Commission approved the communication in COM(2008)125/4 for transmission to Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, and to the national parliaments.

**9. COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION TO THE COUNCIL TO AUTHORISE THE COMMISSION TO OPEN NEGOTIATIONS, ON BEHALF OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY, WITH ALBANIA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, CROATIA, THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA, MONTENEGRO, SERBIA, AND KOSOVO ON A TREATY ESTABLISHING A TRANSPORT COMMUNITY (SEC(2008)287 TO /4; SEC(2008)278)**

The Commission approved the recommendation in SEC(2008)287/4 for transmission to the Council.

**10. COMMISSION DECISION ON A PROCEEDING UNDER ARTICLE 86(3) OF THE EC TREATY CONCERNING THE GRANTING OR MAINTENANCE BY GREECE OF RIGHTS FOR PUBLIC POWER CORPORATION SA FOR THE EXTRACTION OF LIGNITE (CASE COMP/38.700 – GREEK LIGNITE AND ELECTRICITY MARKETS) (C(2008)824 TO /5; SEC(2008)307)**

The Commission:

- adopted, in the authentic language (Greek), the decision in C(2008)824/5, establishing that Greece had infringed Article 86(1), in conjunction with Article 82 of the EC Treaty and asking it to terminate the infringement;
- decided to notify the decision set out in C(2008)824/5 to Greece and to the company concerned;
- decided that the most important parts of the decision would be published in the official languages in the Official Journal of the European Union;
- decided to publish the decision on the Internet.

**11. COMMISSION DECISION ON A PROCEEDING UNDER ARTICLE 8(1) OF COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) 139/2004 ON THE CONTROL OF CONCENTRATIONS BETWEEN UNDERTAKINGS AND ARTICLE 57 OF THE EEA AGREEMENT (CASE COMP/M.4747 – IBM/TELELOGIC) (C(2008)823 TO /5)**

The Commission:

- took note of the opinion of the Advisory Committee on Concentrations of 6 February in C(2008)823/3;
- took note of the final report of the Hearing Officer of 22 February in C(2008)823/4;
- adopted, in the authentic language (English), the decision in C(2008)823/5, declaring the notified operation to be compatible with the common market and the agreement on the European Economic Area;
- decided to notify the decision set out in C(2008)823/5 to the firm concerned, together with the final report of the Hearing Officer and the opinion of the Advisory Committee;
- decided that the most important parts of the decision and the opinion of the Advisory Committee and the report of the Hearing Officer would be published in the official languages in the Official Journal of the European Union (with business secrets removed);
- decided to publish the decision (with business secrets removed) on the Internet.

## **12. RELATIONS WITH THIRD COUNTRIES**

### ***12.1. COMMISSION RESPONSE TO THE POST-ELECTORAL POLITICAL CRISIS IN KENYA (JANUARY AND FEBRUARY)***

***(SEC(2008)318)***

The Commission took note of the information note from Mr MICHEL in SEC(2008)318.

### ***12.2. VISIT TO CHAD (N'DJAMENA, 27 FEBRUARY)***

***(SEC(2008)319)***

The Commission took note of the information note from Mr MICHEL in SEC(2008)319.

### ***12.3. LATEST DEVELOPMENTS CONCERNING IMPORTS OF BEEF FROM BRAZIL***

***(SEC(2008)321/2)***

The Commission took note of the information note from Ms VASSILIOU in SEC(2008)321/2.

## **13. OTHER BUSINESS**

### ***RESULTS OF THE EUROBAROMETER SURVEY ON PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF THE EUROPEAN REGIONAL POLICY***

***(SEC(2008)324)***

The Commission took note of the information note from Ms HÜBNER in SEC(2008)324.

#### **14. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL – WESTERN BALKANS - ENHANCING THE EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE**

**(COM(2008)127 TO /6; SEC(2008)288 AND /2; SEC(2008)289)**

Mr REHN presented the communication on the Western Balkans, which he was tabling for approval, placing it in the current political context of the region and reminding the meeting that it was a follow-up to a request from the current Council Presidency. He outlined the main points of the communication, which took stock of the situation in the various countries of the region and listed the specific and general initiatives which might be taken to enhance the European perspective of each of those countries.

As regards the regional dimension of the communication, Mr REHN stressed that it was important to keep in mind the prospects of the region as a whole, without, however, forgetting the specific circumstances of each country. In this regard, each of the countries had made considerable progress towards the European Union over the last two years.

He recalled the target of signing and implementing a stabilisation and association agreement with each of the countries and mentioned the free-trade agreements that had already been signed. He also referred to a recent development which was positive in every respect, namely the transformation of the Stability Pact for South-East Europe, set up in 1999, into a Regional Cooperation Council for South-East Europe.

After highlighting the quality of the current policies and instruments and the progress that had been made, he nevertheless warned that certain political tensions were likely to arise in the short and medium term in certain countries of the region and that the Commission should, in this context, send a clear message to the countries concerned and propose to them concrete measures, such as exemption from visas, a doubling of the number of scholarships, participation in European research programmes and European transport networks. Lastly, he pointed to the financial importance of pre-accession aid for the countries of the Region.

Mr BARROT then presented the documents on the extension of major transport networks to countries neighbouring on the EU, and in particular those in the Western Balkans (see items 8 and 9 of these minutes). Thanking Mr REHN for his constructive cooperation, he said he was convinced that these measures, which were being tabled alongside the general communication on the Western Balkans, provided an opportunity to restate the Union's strong commitment to the region's European perspective, while recalling the need for the countries concerned to cooperate and to meet their commitments with a view to their European future.

On the specific question of establishing a transport community with the Western Balkans, he explained that the aim was to set up an integrated market in infrastructure, land transport, inland waterways and maritime transport and to harmonise transport legislation in the Balkans region with the *acquis communautaire*. The proposed treaty would help modernise and interconnect infrastructure, harmonise the rules on security, environmental protection and services, and ensure the interoperability of networks from a technical and regulatory angle.

The Commission had a vital role to play in this practical cooperation project, which had the support of the current Council Presidency. Mr BARROT was convinced that a transport community of this kind was a practical means of fostering cooperation, stability and peace in the region, in line with the principles of mutual understanding and cooperation set out by Mr Jean Monnet.

The PRESIDENT thanked Mr REHN and Mr BARROT for their presentations. He stressed the balanced nature of the communication on the Western Balkans, which was an appropriate response to the Council Presidency's request and formed an excellent basis for pursuing negotiations and discussions between the European Union and the countries of the region.

The PRESIDENT highlighted the importance of the messages which the Commission wanted to convey in the region, i.e. expressing confidence and encouragement while also insisting on strict compliance with conditions - this last

point being vital to the Union's credibility - and a redoubling of efforts by the countries of the region.

He also noted that the proposed measures on transport were a good example of stimulating a process of integration in a European perspective, as they emphasised the interest the countries concerned had in cooperating with the European Union and with each other.

The Commission then held a discussion during which the following points were raised:

***General aspects***

- the European aspirations of all the countries of the region, their importance for the European Union, and the wish to continue efforts to re-establish their historical links with the rest of Europe;
- the importance of conveying the message that the Commission was encouraging the countries of the region and wished to provide them with every possible support on their road to the European Union, while stressing the conditions that had been set and the need for those countries to comply strictly with the pre-defined criteria;
- the importance for the Western Balkans region of drawing lessons from the last enlargement;
- the importance of the present initiative in extending the various strands of cooperation between the Union and the countries of the Western Balkans, particularly in the fields of transport, visa liberalisation, scholarships and civil society development and dialogue;
- the relevance and value of this general communication, which should not be confused with the annual progress reports;

***Aspects relating to cooperation on justice, freedom and security***

- the priority that should be given to strengthening cross-border cooperation and in particular to the development of a network of judges;
- the importance for regional cooperation of the threat assessment report on organised crime;
- satisfaction at the Council's support for visa liberalisation and the importance of perfect coherence between Member States in implementing the planned measures;
- as regards Bosnia and Herzegovina, the urgent need for substantial progress in reforming the police, combating terrorism, and developing biometric passports;
- the importance of developing a common basis between the EU and Kosovo so that closer cooperation on relaxing visa formalities could be developed later;
- the possible effects of any liberalisation of visas for relations between the EU and other non-member countries;

***Specific aspects concerning the various countries of the region***

- the importance of Serbia continuing its efforts to develop its European perspective;
- the encouragement which the Commission wished to give to Serbia, but also the importance of Serbia meeting its obligations, including full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia;
- Serbia's key role in - and responsibility for - the future and stability of the region;
- the importance for Croatia of the prospect of accession;
- equally, the importance of Croatia fully complying with the reference criteria in order to make progress in the accession negotiations;

- recognition of the constructive attitude shown by the Commission and the Member States to help make substantial progress in the accession negotiations with Croatia;
- the need to tackle immediately the issue of the ecological and fisheries protection zone, without prejudice to the need for Croatia to achieve substantial progress in judicial and administrative reforms, combating corruption, minority rights, refugee return and sectoral restructuring;
- the importance of proper implementation by the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia of all the commitments made under the accession partnerships and under the stabilisation and association agreement;
- the importance of Kosovo for the stability of the whole region.

The PRESIDENT wound up the debate by thanking Mr REHN and Mr BARROT - and the departments under their responsibility - for their excellent work. He praised the very high standard of the texts and again stressed their importance. He also thanked the other Commission Members and all departments for their constructive contributions.

He confirmed the Commission's resolve to continue support for the efforts of the countries of the region to forge closer ties with the EU, while also pointing out the need for them to comply strictly with all the criteria and conditions laid down for each stage in the process. He also stressed the importance of conveying a clear message of confidence with regard to the countries of the Western Balkans, while at the same time insisting that the conditions attached to closer relations be rigorously applied.

Following this debate, the Commission approved the communication set out in COM(2008)127/6, for transmission to Parliament and the Council, and to the national parliaments, together with the Annex thereto, set out in staff paper SEC(2008)288/2, the contents of which were noted.

**15. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS – REINFORCING THE UNION'S DISASTER RESPONSE CAPACITY  
(COM(2008)130 TO /4; SEC(2008)306)**

The PRESIDENT briefly presented the communication he was tabling for approval. He recalled that the Commission had attached a high priority to this issue since it first took office around the time of the Indian Ocean tsunami. He ran through the various steps that had been taken since then to improve the European Union's response to this type of event, mentioning in particular the approval in April 2005 of the communication on reinforcing the Union's capacity to respond to disasters and crises in third countries, the establishment of the ARGUS mechanism in December 2005, the recasting proposal concerning the Community Civil Protection Mechanism, the 2006 Barnier report and finally the Consensus on Humanitarian Aid adopted in 2007.

The communication being tabled that day was based on the work of the task force set up in 2007 at his initiative with a view to stepping up coordination within the Commission and with the Council and the Member States. Furthermore, last summer's forest fires and floods had created the necessary political momentum in Parliament and the Council to take this new step.

The aim of the communication was an operational one, i.e. to take a further step towards strengthening the Union's capacity to respond to disasters within existing internal structures and under the Treaty as it stood.

The communication focused on a coherent Commission response in crisis situations rather than on the various policies and instruments for it to deliver that response. The PRESIDENT felt that the moment had come for the Commission to present an ambitious vision encompassing the wide range of tools at its disposal.

Finally, the PRESIDENT briefly mentioned the practical measures proposed in the communication with a view to increasing the Union's reaction capacity and which

pursued four main objectives, viz. improving interinstitutional cooperation, stepping up humanitarian aid, strengthening civil protection and building capacity through all Community policies and instruments. The Annex on forest fires was a response to a specific request by the Council in December and provided a useful illustration of the overall approach being adopted.

Following this presentation, the Commission approved the communication in COM(2008)130/4 for transmission to Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, and to the national parliaments.

## **16. TRENDS IN THE MEMBER STATES**

Ms WALLSTRÖM reported on her visit to Ireland and on preparations there for the referendum on the Treaty of Lisbon.

She noted the concerns raised by opinion poll findings that a large number of voters were undecided (66%) and warned of the risks a low turnout would have for the outcome of the vote. However, she had returned from her visit reassured by the arguments put forward by the opponents of Treaty ratification, which she felt could be answered, and by the strong commitment of the Irish authorities in the ratification campaign.

This campaign, which was aimed at ensuring high voter turnout, was intense, well prepared and supported by a broad national forum and various intermediary bodies such as trade unions, farmers' unions and local authorities. She praised the quality of the public information and educational documents that had been produced, which set out the changes arising from the Treaty in a factual manner.

Finally, she mentioned the aspects which would still require special attention, in particular the debate that was developing on the internet. She stressed that the Commission should take part in this debate, and in particular that its communication

departments should cooperate with the Irish authorities in order to formulate and convey a detailed message on the practical benefits to be expected from entry into force of the future Treaty.

During a brief exchange of views, the Commission noted the importance of mobilising all forces to work towards a positive outcome in the referendum, but also the risks of a low turnout. The Commission also discussed the particularly sensitive nature of the debate which had emerged in Ireland and certain other Member States following the judgment given by the Court of Justice on 18 December 2007 in the *Laval un Partneri Ltd* case on the free movement of workers in the EU against a background of disparities in social legislation. The Commission underlined the need to play a part in distributing objective information on the above case and to strengthen dialogue with political forces in Parliament and with social organisations in Ireland and at European level.

The Commission took note of this information.

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The meeting closed at 11.24 hours.